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Letter dated 9 July 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to submit to you the statement of the Minister of External Relations and International Cooperation of the Republic of Burundi, issued during the extraordinary session of the Ministerial Council on the Burundi situation on 5 July 2015 (see annex).

I kindly request that you share its contents with other Security Council member States as a working document.

(*Signed*) Albert **Shingiro**
Permanent Representative of Burundi

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Annex to the letter dated 9 July 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Statement issued by the Minister of External Relations and International Cooperation, Republic of Burundi

Extraordinary session of the Ministerial Council on the situation in Burundi

Dar es Salaam, 5 July 2015

At the outset, please allow me to thank the Government and the people of the United Republic of Tanzania for the usual warm and most African welcome afforded me and my delegation since our arrival in this beautiful town of Dar es Salaam.

This meeting could not have come at a better time than now. Since the last summit of the East African Community (EAC), held in this very town on 31 May 2015, so many developments have taken place on the road to elections.

Whereas a few days before, the summit had commended the facilitation work of Ambassador Said Djinnit in the dialogue among Burundian parties, the opposition parties blocked the way to dialogue by rejecting Mr. Djinnit on 4 June 2015, at a time when there was much hope towards a consensual solution to many outstanding issues.

The summit had called for a postponement of elections and for the disarmament of armed youth groups affiliated with political parties. The Government has enforced both measures. Elections were rescheduled as follows: the municipal council and the parliamentary elections took place on 29 June 2015, and saw the participation of virtually all the political parties, despite calls for a boycott from some circles. This august body may appreciate the fact that in a 8 June 2015 meeting called for by the Electoral Commission to discuss the new calendar, radical opposition parties under the influence of some external actors chose not to participate. Moreover, with a view to filling the vacuum left by the departure of two electoral commissioners, the Government requested the opposition to propose names in order to diversify the Commission. Again, the radical opposition rejected the offer. The Government had to resort to other means by searching for well-intentioned citizens who met the conditions for that job, in line with the conditions set out in our laws.

The elections of 29 June 2015 were held everywhere in the country. Except for a few incidents which took place in a few areas of Bujumbura on the eve of the elections, there was no major occurrence of violence across the country. The turnout was estimated to oscillate between 70 and 80 per cent. The other elections are scheduled as follows: presidential elections will take place on 15 July 2015 and senatorial elections will be held on 24 July.

Those elections were observed by the United Nations Electoral Observer Mission in Burundi (MENUB), some civil society organizations and countries such as the Republic of Kenya, the Republic of Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and the Republic of South Africa.

The people of Burundi have spoken by casting their votes, whether they are in the opposition or the ruling party. Trends indicate that even opposition parties got

votes cast in their favour. This can be seen as a clear sign that the so-called boycott was just a tactical game.

The "*Amizero y'Abarundi*" (Hope of Burundi) coalition of opposition leader Agathon Rwasa has come behind the Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces pour la défense de la démocratie (CNDD-FDD) party. We have heard that the leaders of this coalition have rejected their results, in a fashion that is reminiscent of the 2010 boycott.

Generally, the observers have found the process to be transparent and credible, despite the negative MENUB report, which, in our opinion, has enjoyed generous input from some of our partners, whose views are not secret to any of us, with regard to the elections in Burundi. However, MENUB recognizes that the participation was massive. In fact, as MENUB has admitted, "the CENI[a] preparations and arrangements for election day were largely sufficient, and polling activities took place regularly in the observed polling places. Nationwide, many Burundians went to the polls to cast their ballots for candidates of their choice."

MENUB further confirms information that most of the opposition parties conducted a door-to-door campaign, owing to many reasons, including lack of funds, even if they kept misleading foreign envoys with claims of them being unable to reach their supporters.

Again, much like the Government, "MENUB regrets that the parties did not reach agreement, through dialogue, to improve these conditions in the pre-electoral period. Regrettably, opposition parties decided to boycott the polls." But as far as the Government is concerned, the so-called boycott was not genuine in the sense that their followers participated in the vote and their candidates were elected throughout the country, as attested by MENUB.

Let me take this opportunity to ask that the EAC send a clear message to opposition parties in our region, inviting them really not to boycott polls.

Now, concerning the results, which should actually be released very soon, trends indicate that the CNDD-FDD comes at the top of the results, followed by the "*Amizero y'Abarundi*" independent coalition of Agathon Rwasa and Charles Nditije. If anything, this is an indication that the door-to-door campaign conducted by this coalition bore fruit and that there was actually no boycott.

There were 11,493 polling stations in the country and 41 in our embassies. There were no incidents in those polling stations, as attested by MENUB and other observers, as said earlier.

Disarmament

Concerning the disarmament of youth groups, in compliance with the 31 May summit, on 8 June 2015 the Government instructed the national permanent commission on disarmament to collect all illegally owned weapons throughout the country. Soon a comprehensive report should be released. We are in a position to inform you that weapons have been collected, sometimes with the use of force, even in areas which served as the base for the demonstrations a few weeks ago.

[a] Commission électorale nationale indépendante.

Our Government will continue this work. Happily, the relevant governmental institutions will work hand in hand with the African Union military experts, who shall be deployed soon, as per the 13 June 2015 communiqué of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union and in the spirit of the consultations carried out by the African Union Commission and the Government of the Republic of Burundi on the matter.

Facilitation and dialogue

It should be recalled that the Joint International Facilitation Team derives its mandate from the 13 June 2015 communiqué of the African Union Peace and Security Council. The communiqué called for the resumption of the dialogue in a week's time after the date of the communiqué. This condition was not met, and, even if we are not here to apportion blame, we need to clearly recognize the fact that the Government was not at the origin of this situation.

While we kept waiting to start the dialogue in the time frame thus set by the African Union Peace and Security Council, the facilitation team only arrived on 21 June 2015 and decided that talks should start on 23 June, that is, six days before the first polls.

The ruling party did not attend the talks for reasons that party leaders should be able to explain themselves, but, from what we were able to hear, the main reason was that the electoral campaign had already started and was under way in view of the elections postponed twice in a two-month period. The extra-parliamentary opposition parties did not attend either, for the same reasons.

As you know, the Government attended the second day of talks, in the person of the Minister of the Interior, here present.

However, the dates proposed by the facilitation could not be agreed upon by both parties.

The Government of the Republic of Burundi wishes to reiterate its commitment to dialogue, so that we can move on from the current political environment. Notably, the Government will be available to discuss any issue after 15 July 2015, so that the electoral process does not suffer any interruption.

While recognizing the efforts of the EAC Secretary-General, the Government of the Republic of Burundi wishes to refer to the communiqué of the 515th meeting of the Peace and Security Council (PSC/PR/COMM.2(DXV)) in its operative part, where the Council "invites the Chairperson of the Commission to immediately initiate the necessary consultations for the operationalization of this international facilitation, under the auspices of the Chair of the EAC". We hereby formally ask the Chair of the summit to appoint a dedicated special envoy, who should lead the dialogue process in Burundi, with the support of the representatives of the other three bodies. Of course, the facilitator thus designated will need the support of the other EAC partner States, which can also appoint envoys, in their own right, to follow the process. Likewise, our Government intends to request the same from the Chair of the summit of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region.

We believe that the facilitation is so demanding that it requires one to be fully dedicated to this job, given the time it takes to listen to parties and to help them narrow the gap between them.

Unfortunately, we have just received information today that some political parties have expressed their wish to have Abdoulaye Bathily replaced by another facilitator. The Forces nationales de libération party, led by Jacques Bigirimana, and the Coalition des partis politiques pour une opposition participative, under the leadership of Jean de Dieu Mutabazi, have totally rejected the facilitation of Mr. Bathily. This meeting is therefore invited to look into this matter more seriously and, if need be, to refer the case to the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, who was tasked with consulting on the formation of the facilitation team.

On the other issues of the Peace and Security Council communiqué, with respect to the deployment of human rights observers and military experts, I am happy to report that the African Union will soon be deploying an advance team of those observers, along the lines agreed upon by the Government and the African Union in our consultations held right after the last African Union summit.

It should be noted that, during the last EAC summit, it was envisaged to send military observers as an accompanying confidence-building measure. It would be welcome if EAC military observers took the lead in the team to be sent by the African Union Commission.

The return of refugees and freedom of the press

As we did last time, we continue to believe that our brothers and sisters have a role to play in our development. We believe that their place is in Burundi, not in refugee camps. Our Government will spare no effort until the last one is repatriated and his or her rights are reinstated. Again, we thank our neighbours for their solidarity shown during these challenging days. We will forever be grateful for everything they did in favour of our own folks.

You can only know a friend when you are in need. In the same vein, we ask them not to be tired of us, as we ask them to continue facilitating the return of those who wish to do so. Moreover, our Government asks our neighbours to kindly assist in not allowing any misguided political activity on their territories, as some refugees may be induced to commit wrongdoing by ill-minded politicians.

Concerning freedom of the press, I can assure you that, although some media are not operational owing to the 13 May 2015 coup attempt and the battles that ensued, a dozen radio stations are still operational and measures are still being taken for the media house to be open again for all journalists.

Five local radio and television stations were able to conduct joint coverage of the last elections, again an indicator that media synergy took place, in the regrettable absence of four private radio stations.

I should hasten to say, however, that, despite consistent information on the possible involvement of some journalists in the attempted coup and the ongoing investigation thereupon, it remains a principle of the Government in Burundi that the press is free and that freedom of expression is guaranteed. Once these investigations are closed, all the media supports should be able to operate again.

In order to fill the vacuum that may have been created in these circumstances, a number of international radio stations have been given a permanent coverage licence.

Requests

1. We ask the regional mechanism to appoint a fully powered and fully dedicated facilitator.

2. We ask the regional mechanism to prevail over the opposition to accept their votes so that the institutions of the Republic of Burundi reflect the votes of the people.

3. We continue to ask for electoral observers. The BAC and the African Union should not follow the path of partners by not sending the observers because the interests of the Western States and organizations are at the antipode of those of the African States.